

BALTIMORE NEWS-AMERICAN
18 March 1982

The CIA slipped up on this one

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Hearst Feature Service

The recent State Department-sponsored film, "Orlando Tardencillas: Double Agent," must be given four stars, despite the fact its producers are now demanding an "X" rating.

It was a spectacular. The certified Nicaraguan trained in Ethiopia and Cuba to lead the cadres in El Salvador would demonstrate once and for all to skeptics the external support of the Salvadoran rebels. When captured in Salvador, he sang so persuasively he was put on exhibition in a golden cage and shipped to Washington.

Then, as the State Department officials who were producing the confession of a reformed subversive gaped, he went into his real number. His whole story of Ethiopian and Cuban training, he said, was a fake, forced from him by a combination of torture and "objective conditions." Except for a few valiant Nicaraguan volunteers like himself, the Marti guerrillas had no significant outside aid against the "fascists" except the revolutionary zeal of the oppressed masses. He was one cool operator.

A number of comments come to mind. First, in a clinical sense, we have to award a touchdown to the KGB for this coruscating disinformation coup, which was undoubtedly stage-managed by its wholly owned Cuban subsidiary, the DGL Tardencillas was perfectly cast; young, thoughtful, sincere and fluent. In fact, too damn fluent, but of that more later. His timing was perfect and in a year or so, after his friends in Managua get his English up to speed, he should be on the U.S. college circuit.

Second, by putting so much emphasis on the value of this "vital

witness to demonstrate Sandinista complicity in the Salvadoran shambles, the government of the United States shot itself in the foot. The problem with the American people is not in the area of knowledge. Almost everybody with an I.Q. over 50 believes the Salvadoran insurgency is supported by Moscow, Havana and Managua—Castro said as much last year to a visiting German Social Democrat.

Thus turning up one man, or a battalion of characters, with Nicaraguan birth certificates in Salvador is not going to alter public perceptions. True, congressmen make a lot of noise about proof, but this is a charade. They know roughly 90 percent of their constituents do not want U.S. military intervention in Salvador, suspect this kind of intervention is the only kind that will work, and want to get out of the epifilade. Hence the essentially preposterous demand for "proof."

The problem, as Marx put it, is not to understand the world, but to change it. It is at this level that public opinion balks. Not because it is pro-Castro, but because it is convinced in an inarticulate fashion that there is no domino in Salvador capable of being propped up.

Since Vietnam is rich in "lessons," let us recall one that is relevant: strong American support for President Diem followed his successful suppression of various Vietnamese private armies ranging from the Cao Dai and Hoa Hoa sects to the formidable Binh Xuyen bandits. We are idealists, but before we put in our stack, we like a face-card in the hole. Our real trouble began in Vietnam after we sponsored Diem's murder. The query today, "Is Jose Duarte a

Napoleon?" does not bring encouraging replies.

Finally, in its desperate rush to "prove" Sandinista involvement to a public that is really asking a different question, Comrade Tardencillas was able to get away with his set-up. This is a demonstration of professional incompetence in the intelligence network for which heads should roll. Is it possible the CIA was cut out of this Pilgrim's Progress because it would delay the climax?

To be precise, Tardencillas fell into Salvadoran and, subsequently, American hands equipped with a "legend"—an elaborate tale of training in Ethiopia and Cuba which was literally too good to be true. As noted earlier, he was too fluent; he obviously knew exactly what the "Yanquis" wanted. James J. Angleton, formerly head of counterintelligence, would have gone on red alert when this beautiful tale reached CIA headquarters.

Jim had a quirk—he occasionally suspected himself of being a KGB "mole"—but he would have laid on Ethiopian and Cuban interrogators. No whips or electric prods—just friendly questions. Where in Ethiopia was he, how long, how was the harvest, weren't the mountains outside Uardere beautiful?

Then that camp in Cuba. Why did they have to put it in a swamp with that stinking river dropping off the sewage from Guayabal? How did he get from Entebbe, the Ethiopian capital, to Cuba? The man is bright, but somewhere along the line he would have blundered. His "objective conditioning" might not have informed him Addis Ababa is the capital of Ethiopia, it is flat at Uardere, and Guayabal is on the Cuban coast.